

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 1639

EO: 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT EAIR EFIN MASS SNAR CO

SUBJ: THE WEEK IN COLOMBIA

1. SUMMARY. THE LOCKHEED BRIBERY SCANDAL COMINATED THE COLOMBIAN PANORAMA AND ADDED TO CONCERN IN GOVERNMENT AND OTHER PUBLIC SECTORS OVER CORRUPTION. APATHY CHARACTERIZED PREPARATIONS FOR THE APRIL 13 MID-TERM ELECTIONS, WITH POSSIBLE BENEFIT TO THE EXTREME LEFT. GUNPLAY AT BOGOTA'S AIRPORT PUNCTUATED A SUCCESSFUL US-GOC NARCOTICS INTERDICTION OPERATION. EX-PRESIDENT PASTRANA ATTACKED GOVERNMENT FISCAL PERFORMANCE. THE MINISTER OF GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCED THAT THE STATE OF SIEGE WOULD CONTINUE FOR THE TIME BEING, WHICH COULD MEAN THAT THE APRIL ELECTION WOULD BE THE FIRST IN RECENT YEARS TO BE HELD UNDER THAT RESTRAINT. END SUMMARY.

2. LOCKHEED SCANDAL CONTINUES TO UNFOLD. ALLEGATIONS THAT LOCKHEED REPRESENTATIVES BRIBED COLOMBIAN GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS IN CONNECTION WITH THE PURCHASE OF THREE C-130'S RECEIVED HEAVY PUBLICITY THROUGHOUT THE WEEK. A HIGH LEVEL TEAM HAS BEEN APPOINTED

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TO INVESTIGATE THE CHARGES, AND WHILE THE INVESTIGATION ITSELF WILL BE CONDUCTED IN PRIVATE, IT APPEARS NOW THAT THE FINDINGS WILL BE MADE PUBLIC. PART OF THE INVESTIGATION WILL INVOLVE A STUDY OF THE CORRESPONDENCE SUPPOSEDLY EXCHANGED BETWEEN LOCKHEED AGENTS IN COLOMBIAN AND THE HOME OFFICE. THE COLOMBIAN GOVERNMENT HAS ALREADY REQUESTED THAT THE U.S. GOVERNMENT PROVIDE COPIES OF ANY CORRESPONDENCE PERTAINING TO THE MATTER AND A SENATE COMMITTEE, WHICH MAY CARRY OUT AN INDEPENDENT INVESTIGATION, HAS MADE A SIMILAR REQUEST DIRECTLY TO THE U.S. SENATE. IN THIS REGARD, FORMER PRESIDENT CARLOS LLERAS HAS STATED THAT THE COLOMBIAN GOVERNMENT HAS THE RIGHT TO INSIST ON THE FULL COOPERATION OF THE U.S. GOVERNMENT IN CLARIFYING THE BRIBERY CHARGES. LLERAS AND OTHERS, HOWEVER, TEND TO MAINTAIN THAT THE ACCUSATIONS ARE GROUNDLESS AND THAT GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS ACTED HONESTLY IN ALL DEALINGS WITH LOCKHEED. NEVERTHELESS, SHOULD THE GOVERNMENT'S INVESTIGATIONS REVEAL THAT BRIBES WERE OFFERED AND ACCEPTED, THE POSSIBILITY REMAINS THAT NO ACTION CAN BE TAKEN AGAINST THE GUILTY PARTIES SINCE THE STATUTE OF LIMITATIONS MAY HAVE EXPIRED.

3. CONCERN OVER ELECTION OUTCOME. THE OUTLOOK IS THAT VOTER TURN OUT FOR THE APRIL 18 MID-TERM ELECTIONS FOR DEPARTMENTAL ASSEMBLIES AND CITY COUNCILS WILL BE VERY LIGHT THROUGHOUT COLOMBIA, EVEN FOR AN OFF-YEAR ELECTION, AND THAT THIS WILL FAVOR THE EXTREME LEFT, PARTICULARLY IN BOGOTA. VOTER REGISTRATIONS THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY ARE WAY DOWN AND NEIGHBORHOOD RALLIES SPARSELY ATTENDED. EMBASSY SOURCES CITE AS CAUSES WIDESPREAD APATHY AND DISAFFECTION DUE MAINLY TO INFLATION AND WELL-PUBLICIZED SCANDALS AND CORRUPTION. IN BOGOTA, WHERE THE MAOIST MOIR IS WAGING AN ACTIVE CAMPAIGN, THE MOIR MAY BENEFIT HEAVILY FROM THE GENERAL APATHY, WHICH DOES NOT AFFECT ITS OWN FOLLOWERS. IF MOIR VOTES APPROACH THOSE OF THE 1974 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION, WHEN IT RECEIVED 45,000 OF A 319,000 TOTAL, IT WOULD SIGNIFICANTLY INCREASE ITS REPRESENTATION ON THE CAPITAL CITY'S COUNCIL AND WIN A PSYCHOLOGICAL VICTORY.

4. THE DRUG SCENE: COPS ONE, TRAFFICKERS ZERO. IN A DRAMATIC SHOOT OUT AT BOGOTA'S CROWDED ELDORADO AIRPORT ON FEBRUARY 11, NATIONAL POLICE NARCOTICS AGENTS THIS WEEK ARRESTED TWO OF COLOMBIA'S MAJOR TRAFFICKERS, FABIO RESTREPO AND JOSE IGNACIO AGUIRRE. RESTREPO'S BODYGUARD WAS KILLED AND TWO AGENTS, INCLUDING THE CONFIDENTIAL

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CHIEF OF THE POLICE NARCO UNIT, WERE LIGHTLY WOUNDED. THE CASE WAS DEVELOPED AS PART OF JOINT US-GOC NARCOTICS INTERDICTION OPERATION, CODE-NAMED "KITCHEN", UNDERWAY SINCE MID-OCTOBER. THE OPERATION, DUE TO CONTINUE THROUGH THE END OF FEBRUARY, HAS RESULTED SO FAR IN THE SEIZURE OF OVER 500 KILOGRAMS OF COCAINE, TWO CLANDESTINE COCAINE PROCESSING LABS, AND SEVERAL VEHICLES, AS WELL AS THE ARREST OF OVER 60 IMPORTANT TRAFFICKERS, OF WHOM RESTREPO AND AGUIRRE ARE THE MOST PROMINENT.

5. PASTRANA CRITICIZES LOPEZ' ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE. FORMER PRESIDENT PASTRANA THIS WEEK STRONGLY CRITICIZED THE LOPEZ ADMINISTRATION FOR FISCAL MISMANAGEMENT. HE CHARGED THAT LITTLE REMAINED OF PLANS ARTICULATED DURING THE ECONOMIC EMERGENCY AND CHASTIZED THE ADMINISTRATION FOR PROFILGATE SPENDING AND A FIVE BILLION-PESO CASH DEFICIT. THE PROBLEM SEEMS TO HAVE STEMMED FROM SOME CONFUSION IN TREASURY AND THE CONTROLARIA IN DECEMBER OVER JUST WHAT THE DEFICIT WAS AND WHERE IT CAME FROM. ALMOST DAILY RUMORS OF A NEW AND LARGER BUDGET DEFICIT CIRCULATED AND THE PROMISE OFFERED BY THE TAX REFORM AND THE NEW ECONOMIC TEAM SEEMED TO HAVE BEEN DESTROYED. IT APPEARS, AND AT THP
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ONE CANNOT BE POSITIVE ABOUT THE FIGURES, THAT THE DEFICIT WAS ONLY 140 MILLION PESOS AND THAT THE BILLION PESOS OF CENTRAL BANK BORROWING IN DECEMBER RESULTED FROM THE FAILURE TO FLOAT NEW INSTRUMENTS DURING THE YEAR AS PART OF THE TURNOVER OF EXISTING DEBT. IN ANY EVENT LOPEZ MUST UNDO THE DAMAGE DONE TO HIS REPUTATION AND CREDIBILITY BY THE FEW WEEKS OF CONFUSION ABOUT NUMBERS. THE MATTER IS IMPORTANT BECAUSE THERE ARE ONLY A MILLION AND A HALF TAXPAYERS INCLUDING BUSINESSES AND OF THESE ONLY A PORTION BORE THE ENTIRE BURDEN OF A 50 PERCENT INCREASE IN DIRECT TAX REVENUES. IF THESE TAXPAYERS SEE THEIR TAXES FRITTERED AWAY BY THE BUREAUCRACY WITH LITTLE TO SHOW, THE SUPPORT THAT UP TO NOW HAS BEEN FORTHCOMING, COULD TOTALLY DISSIPATE.

6. STATE OF SIEGE TO REMAIN FOR TIME BEING. MINISTER OF GOVERNMENT REYES SAID ON FEBRUARY 12 THAT THE STATE OF SIEGE WOULD CONTINUE FOR THE TIME BEING. HE ADDED THAT IT WOULD NOT, HOWEVER, INTERFERE WITH BASIC LIBERTIES ASSOCIATED WITH THE APRIL ELECTIONS. THIS HAS CAUSED SPECULATION THAT THE STATE OF SIEGE WOULD REMAIN IN EFFECT THROUGH THE ELECTION, AN UNUSUAL SITUATION IN RECENT YEARS. THE MINISTER SAID THAT CONTINUED "ANTI-SOCIAL AC-
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TIVITIES" THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY MADE THE CONTINUANCE OF THE STATE OF SIEGE NECESSARY. MEANWHILE, DISTURBANCES CONTINUED IN TULUA NEAR CALI AND IN MEDELLIN (BOGOTA 1367) WHERE STUDENTS ARE STILL LEADING A CONFRONTATION WITH LOCAL AUTHORITIES. SOME TOWN ON THE NORTH COAST HAVE BEEN PLAGUED BY CIVIC STRIKES CAUSED BY POOR PUBLIC SERVICES. LABOR PROBLEMS CONTINUE TO PLAGUE THE RIOPAILA SUGAR OPERATION IN EL VALLE.
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